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SUBJECT: UNICEF AND MPS REPORT ON TRAFFICKING IN VIETNAM

¶1. (U) Summary: The Ministry of Public Security, working in cooperation with Cooperazione Italiana and UNICEF, released the government's first comprehensive statistical report on trafficking in Vietnam. At the same time, the GVN and other agencies in Vietnam agree that "official" trafficking statistics are lower than actual numbers because the study does not correct for unreported cases. End Summary.

¶2. (U) MPS worked with UNICEF to gather cumulative statistics on TIP cases through June 2003 in 17 "hot spot" provinces and cities throughout Vietnam: Lao Cai, Ha Giang, Cao Bang, Lang Son, Quang Ninh, Ha Tay, Bac Giang, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ho Chi Minh City, Tay Ninh, An Giang, Dong Thap, Vinh Long, Can Tho, and in two districts located at the border in Lai Chau Province. UNICEF and UNODC believe the actual number of people being trafficked to be significantly greater than that mentioned in the report, but the report was restricted to cases the police could confirm. According to UNICEF, Vietnamese authorities estimate "thousands" of women and children are trafficked each year, while UNICEF China refers to Chinese reports of approximately 20,000 Vietnamese trafficking victims currently living in China. MPS explicitly acknowledged the understatement in the report, noting that the methodology of the research restricted reporting to confirmable cases.

¶3. (U) According to the report, the police recorded 1758 trafficking cases through 2003. Of the 1758 cases, 870 victims had returned to Vietnam, while 880 cases remained abroad. From 1997 to June 2003, the number of repatriated victims steadily increased, with 80 cases before 1997; 83 in 1998; 89 in 1999; 142 in 2000; 167 in 2001; and 245 in 2002 and the first six months of 2003. This increasing trend suggests the government is taking steps to see that victims are repatriated and that the victims are willing to report their situations to the police.

¶4. (U) Meanwhile, no trend exists for the number of people being stopped at the border. The MPS reports 470 cases being trafficked abroad before 1998; 175 in 1998; 306 in 1999; 245 in 2000; 196 in 2001; and 124 in 2002 and six months of 2003.

¶5. (U) Noortje Verhart of IOM Hanoi, Nguyen Hoang Oanh of IOOM HCMC, and Troels Vester of UNODC based in Hanoi agreed that the statistics understated the actual number of victims and traffickers in the country. Trafficking was still a relatively new issue to the Vietnamese, said Vester, and that might account for the relatively low number of arrests. UNODC training of law enforcement officials in June 2004 represented an effort to increase prosecution of TIP crimes, he noted. Mrs. Oanh of IOM commented that many TIP victims went undetected. They refused to report to the police because of the social stigma associated with sexual labor.

¶6. (U) Comment: The release of the first comprehensive report on TIP activities in the country suggests that the GVN is increasing its awareness of the issue and trying to be more open about its efforts to combat trafficking. The GVN sought the assistance of NGOs in doing the research, and the report was published with the help of UNICEF and Cooperazione Italiana, indicating that the GVN has opted to endure the embarrassment of a public acknowledgement of the trafficking problem in order to increase the effectiveness of its anti-trafficking efforts. Even with international assistance, however, the GVN is restricted in its data collection to known cases. To get a more accurate picture of the actual trafficking situation in Vietnam, researchers will need to use more sophisticated sampling and analysis techniques and engage in at least some extrapolation. End Comment.

MARINE